

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 02545 250604Z

21/10

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 ORM-01 SR-02 SCA-01 FDRE-00 IO-10

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DPW-01 SSO-00 INSE-00

/075 W

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R 240645Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5550

INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2545

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: VS, AS, PFOR, SREF

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN DEBATE ON VIETNAMESE REFUGEES CONTINUES,  
BUT FEW LIKELY TO BE ACCEPTED

REF: A) CANBERRA 2516; (B) CANBERRA 2494

1. SUMMARY: GOA PROGRAM TO MOVE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES TO AUSTRALIA IS MAKING LITTLE PROGRESS AND PROBABLY WILL NOT COVER MORE THAN 100-200 PERSONS. PRESS COMMENT ON SMALLNESS OF PROGRAM HAS RECOGNIZED DIFFICULTY OF GETTING VIETNAMESE OUT OF SAIGON, BUT "CANBERRA TIMES" APR 24 SHARPLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE. OPPOSITION CONTINUES TO ATTACK SMALLNESS OF PROGRAM, BUT SEEMS CONCERNED, AS DOES GOVERNMENT, WITH SCORING POINTS OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL IMPORTANCE. WITH PARLIAMENT IN RECESS FOR NEXT THREE WEEKS AND PRIME MINISTER ON TRIP, ISSUE MAY ATTRACT LESS ATTENTION. LABOR GOVERNMENT CLEARLY HOPES WHOLE  
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PAGE 02 CANBER 02545 250604Z

MATTER WILL SOMEHOW DISAPPEAR. END SUMMARY.

2. DEBATE BETWEEN LABOR GOVERNMENT AND LIBERAL-COUNTRY OPPOSITION CONTINUES ON ISSUE OF ADMISSION OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES INTO AUSTRALIA. HOWEVER, PRESENT INDICATIONS ARE THAT RELATIVELY FEW VIETNAMESE WILL BE ABLE TO COME TO AUSTRALIA. DEBATE APPEARS TO BE FOCUSED ON SCORING POINTS OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL IMPORTANCE, BUT WITH PARLIAMENT IN RECESS FOR NEXT THREE WEEKS AND PRIME MINISTER ON TRIP TO SOUTH AND NORTH AMERICA, ISSUE MAY ATTRACT LESS ATTENTION. LABOR GOVERNMENT CLEARLY HOPES WHOLE MATTER WILL SOMEHOW DISAPPEAR.

3. ALAN RENOUF, SECRETARY OF DFA, TOLD AMBASSADOR APR 23 THAT HE EXPECTS THAT NO MORE THAN 200 SOUTH VIETNAMESE WILL BE PROCESSED FOR EVACUATION TO AUSTRALIA. BECAUSE OF THE LAST MINUTE RUSH AGAINST BACKGROUND OF INADEQUATE PREPARATIONS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT NO MORE THAN 125 WILL GET OUT OF SAIGON, TRAVELLING ON RAAF C-130'S TO BANGKOK.

4. SOUTH VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA, LARGELY CONCENTRATED IN UNIVERSITIES IN MELBOURNE, SYDNEY, AND CANBERRA, HAVE SENT SERIES OF TELEGRAMS AND PETITIONS TO GOA, ASKING FOR BROADENING OF QTE UNNECESSARILY NARROW CATEGORIES END QTE OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WHO WILL BE ADMITTED INTO AUSTRALIA UNDER PROGRAM ANNOUNCED BY PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM ON APRIL 22 (REF B). IN ANSWER TO QUESTION BY OPPOSITION LEADER IN PARLIAMENT APR 23, WHITLAM SAID THAT 115 VIETNAMESE HAD BEEN APPROVED FOR RESIDENCE IN AUSTRALIA UNDER REGULATIONS WHICH EXISTED PRIOR TO THE CATEGORIES WHITLAM HAD ANNOUNCED ON APR 22. NOT CLEAR WHAT TIME FRAME WAS DURING WHICH 115 VIETNAMESE ADMITTED TO AUSTRALIA.

5. OPPOSITION CONTINUES TO EXPRESS ITS CONCERN OVER NARROW SCOPE OF PROGRAM. OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER'S QUESTION TO WHITLAM APR 23 ASKED WHY PROGRAM ANNOUNCED BY PRIME MINISTER SET CONDITIONS QTE NARROWER THAN THOSE THAT APPLY UNDER THE NORMAL IMMIGRATION PROGRAM END QTE AND NOTED THAT QTE NO SUCH RESTRICTION AS HE HAS PLACED ON VIETNAMESE WAS APPLIED TO REFUGEES FROM HUNGARY, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AND CHILE END QTE. OPPOSITION SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION, MICHAEL MACKELLAR, TELEPHONED EMBOFF APR 24 FOR INFO ON U.S. PROGRAM FOR EVACUATING VIETNAMESE REFUGEES. HE SAID LABOR GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN QTE GROSSLY  
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PAGE 03 CANBER 02545 250604Z

NEGLECTFUL OF ITS RESPONSIBILITIES END QTE IN ITS CAUTIOUS AND HESITANT APPROACH TO WHOLE ISSUE. MACKELLAR SAID OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER WOULD HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE IN SYDNEY APR 24 AND WOULD PROBABLY TOUCH ON LABOR GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF REFUGEES.

6. ACTING MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WILLIAM MORRISON, COMMENTED TO AUSTRALIAN MEDIA APR 24 THAT U.S. WAS ACTING ILLEGALLY IN MOVING VIETNAMESE REFUGEES FROM SAIGON WITHOUT GVN EXIT VISA.

ACTING SECRETARY OF DFA ROWLAND CALLED AMBASSADOR LATER ON APR 24 TO EXPLAIN THAT MORRISON HAD STATED HE WAS CORNERED BY PRESS AND HAD NOT INTENDED TO SUGGEST U.S. VIOLATING LAW. MORRISON REGRETTED HAVING MADE REMARK.

7. PRESS COMMENT HAS BEEN RESTRAINED, FOR MOST PART, RECOGNIZING DIFFICULTY OF GETTING VIETNAMESE OUT OF SAIGON UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS, THOUGH ALSO GENERALLY RECOGNIZING THAT LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS NOT EXERTED ITSELF ON ISSUE. INFLUENTIAL "CANBERRA TIMES" EDITORIAL OF APR 24 STATES QTE IF THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT MOVE SWIFTLY TO AMEND THE POLICY STATED ON TUESDAY, ITS PALTRY, GRUDGING RESPONSE TO THE PLIGHT OF ADULT VIETNAMESE REFUGEES STANDS TO FIGURE AS ONE OF THE DARKEST, MOST DEMEANING AND MISERABLE EPISODES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WHITLAM ADMINISTRATION - A HISTORY THAT WAS TO HAVE BEEN MARKED BY A NEW ENLIGHTENMENT, A RENUNCIATION OF RACISM, AN ASSERTION OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES... FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO ACCEPT THE COURSE PRESCRIBED BY MR. WHITLAM ON TUESDAY IS TO DO NO MORE THAN WASH ITS HANDS OF AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSIBILITY. AND PONTIUS PILATE NEVER CUT MUCH OF A FIGURE IN THE HISTORY BOOKS. END QTE.

8. COMMENT: WITH WHITLAM'S DEPARTURE APR 23 FOR 18-DAY TRIP TO SOUTH AND NORTH AMERICA, LABOR GOVERNMENT CLEARLY HOPES ISSUE WILL DIE DOWN. IF CEASEFIRE SHOULD INTERVENE IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND REFUGEES CONTINUE TO DEPART FROM SAIGON, ISSUE MAY REMAIN BEFORE PUBLIC, IN WHICH CASE GOA WILL BE AT SOME DISADVANTAGE, AS PRESENT TRENDS IN PUBLIC OPINION INDICATE. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME, LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS DERIVED LITTLE CREDIT FROM THIS EPISODE, DISPLAYING UNIMAGINATIVE AND BUREAUCRATIC APPROACH TO PROBLEM WHERE LARGE, HUMANITARIAN GESTURE WAS CALLED FOR. AUSTRALIAN MEDIA REPORTING IN DETAIL LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES BEING MOVED UNDER U.S. PROGRAMS AND PAROLE ARRANGEMENTS ADOPTED TO BYPASS NORMALLY TIME-CONSUMING U.S. IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES. CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 CANBER 02545 250604Z

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## Message Attributes

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**Concepts:** REFUGEE RELIEF, REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, POLICIES  
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**Copy:** SINGLE  
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**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
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**Reference:** 75 CANBERRA 2516, 75 CANBERRA 2494  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** ellisoob  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 03 JUL 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <03 JUL 2003 by WorrelSW>; APPROVED <18 NOV 2003 by ellisoob>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
05 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
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**TAGS:** PFOR, SREF, VS, AS  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006